
Resources:

A Field Guide to Sustainability – an informational booklet that provides more information on sustainability.
www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0304005.pdf


Northwest EcoBuilding Guild – an educational forum whose mission is to encourage green building practices
www.ecobuildin.org/

Northwest Environment Watch – a non-profit organization that aims to foster a sustainable economy and way of life in the Pacific Northwest.
www.northwestwatch.org

Washington Toxics Coalition – a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting public health and the environment by identifying and promoting alternatives to toxic chemicals
www.watoxics.org/toxmenu.asp

The Natural Step system – a scientifically based framework for sustainable decision-making
www.naturalstep.org

If you require this document in an alternate format, please contact the Solid Waste & Financial Assistance Program at (360) 407-6900 or TTY 711 or 1-800-833-6388.

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A Pocket Guide to Sustainability



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What is sustainability?

Sustainability provides for current needs without sacrificing the needs of future generations. Sustainable practices require that we evaluate how our decisions today will affect society, the environment and the economies of the future.

Sustainability acknowledges that people, economies and all life depend on healthy functioning societies, economies and ecosystems.

Some key principles include:

- ◎ Reducing our reliance on non-renewable energy sources and limited raw materials
- ◎ Reducing waste, reusing or recycling materials
- ◎ Reducing dependence on synthetic compounds
- ◎ Reversing the decline of natural resources
- ◎ Anticipating and preventing problems in the future.

A sustainable activity is one that:

◎ Addresses the relationship between the environmental, economic and social aspects of an activity

◎ Addresses root causes of problems and prevents or eliminates them, rather than dealing with their consequences

◎ Avoids shifting impacts from one area to another in relation to the environment, the economy and the community

◎ Recognizes the irreplaceable value of natural capital in supporting all life

◎ If not fully sustainable, provides a transition toward more sustainable outcomes

*“The world
will not
evolve past its
current state
of crisis
by using
the same
thinking that
created the
situation”*

Albert
Einstein

Sustainability checklist

At Home

Reduce waste

- ☐ Buy durable, reusable and energy-efficient products
- ☐ Plan meals and use a shopping list
- ☐ Avoid single-use, disposable items
- ☐ Carry canvas bags to store

Reuse materials

- ☐ Use towels, rags and sponges instead of paper towels
- ☐ Use mayonnaise jars for storing leftovers
- ☐ Reuse wood from demolition to reconstruct
- ☐ Donate used items to secondhand/reuse stores

Recycle materials

- ☐ Establish a recycling area in your home
- ☐ Create a system to collect and compost organic materials such as food waste
- ☐ Use a mulching lawn mower instead of bagging grass clippings
- ☐ Use both sides of a sheet of paper

It takes 450 years for plastic to decompose and become part of the soil

Out shopping

Support economic vitality and fairness:

- ☐ Shop at local farmers markets
- ☐ Use locally-produced materials
- ☐ Support locally-owned and independent businesses
- ☐ Purchase products from companies who engage in fair labor practices

Choose environmentally-friendly products and services

- ☐ Borrow or rent, instead of buying, check out thrift stores
- ☐ Buy products made of recycled materials
- ☐ Consider fuel-efficient cars, appliances and products at next purchase
- ☐ Avoid purchasing packaged items (buy in bulk)
- ☐ Ask yourself if you really need it before you buy it

In the environment

Use less water

- ☐ Landscape yards with low-maintenance plantings, using native plants and vegetation
- ☐ Avoid removing or degrading existing, drought-tolerant native vegetation
- ☐ Use low-flow shower heads
- ☐ Use drip irrigation or only water when needed at night or early in the morning
- ☐ Use mulch in your garden to retain moisture and control weeds

Use fewer chemicals

- ☐ Avoid chemical applications on your yard (e.g. pull weeds, use mulch to control weeds, use compost for fertilization)
- ☐ Avoid purchasing products containing mercury
- ☐ Properly dispose of household paints, cleaning products and other hazardous materials

A light bulb can be turned on for 4 hours with the energy saved from recycling one glass bottle.

Use clean renewable sources of energy instead of fossil fuels

- ☐ Request the option of purchasing green power from the power company (green power is a renewable energy source, e.g. solar, wind)
- ☐ Carpool, ride your bike, or walk instead of driving alone
- ☐ Use a clothes line instead of your dryer during warm weather

Increase the efficiency of energy use

- ☐ Buy vehicles with high fuel efficiency or alternative fuel source
- ☐ Use energy-efficient appliances and run full loads
- ☐ Control energy use for heating and cooling (e.g. use a programmable thermostat)

In the community

Contribute to the long-term quality of life

- ☐ Get to know your neighbors
- ☐ Run for local office
- ☐ Support your local schools
- ☐ Learn about natural systems